



PRELIMINARY DECLARATION

I- INTRODUCTION

- 1- In pursuance of the provisions of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and within the framework of the Programme of Assistance to Member States organizing elections, **His Excellency Alain Marcel de Souza**, President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, deployed an election observation mission (EOM) to the presidential and representative elections of 10 October, 2017 in the Republic of Liberia.
- 2- The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission composed of 21 Long term observers and 50 short term observers and was led by **His Excellency John Dramani Mahama**, immediate past president of the Republic of Ghana. The Mission comprised of representatives of ECOWAS Member States ambassadors accredited to ECOWAS, representatives of parliamentarians in the ECOWAS Parliament, experts drawn from Member States' Electoral Commissions, civil society organizations, the media and ECOWAS training centres of excellence. The Mission was supported by a technical team from the ECOWAS Commission, led by **Her Excellency Mrs. Halima Ahmed**, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.

II- BACKGROUND TO THE GENERAL ELECTIONS

- 3- The 10 October 2017 elections in Liberia marked the first political transition from one democratically elected government to another in the history of the country. It is against this backdrop and guided by the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the African Charter on Democracy and Governance, the International Declaration on the Principles of Election Observation and the relevant legal texts governing electoral processes in the Republic of Liberia, that the ECOWAS EOM sought to support the conduct of credible and peaceful elections in solidarity with the people of Liberia and their efforts to further consolidate democracy in the country.
- 4- It is worth recalling that since the end of the country's Civil War in 1997, Liberians have demonstrated their commitment to democracy through the

organization of periodic and regular elections. These elections were conducted by Liberia's National Elections Commission (NEC) with the support of other national institutions including the Liberia National Police (LNP), the Armed Forces, Immigration Service, Fire Service, Drug Enforcement Agency and the Customs Service.

- 5- In the course of organizing previous elections and the elections of 10 October 2017 elections, several international stakeholders supported the electoral process. Their immense support contributed to the success of the elections. These stakeholders include the African Union, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the European Union, the Carter Centre, National Democratic Institute (NDI), Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and some foreign missions in Liberia. ECOWAS worked closely and collaborated with these important stakeholders in the training of electoral officials and in the provision of deployment and logistics support.

III- ECOWAS SPECIFIC SUPPORT TO THE 2017 ELECTORAL PROCESS

- 6- Through its Early Warning and Response Mechanism and the Office of the Special Representative of the ECOWAS President in Liberia (SREP), ECOWAS extensively engaged with various national and international actors to monitor the political and security situation in Liberia in the run-up to the elections and during the elections. In this regard, the ECOWAS Commission systematically carried out the following specific actions and activities:
 - i. The deployment of a pre-election Fact-finding Mission from 17 – 21 July 2017 to assess the institutional and legal framework governing the elections. In collaboration with the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), the Commission paid a solidarity visit to the leadership of the Liberian National Elections Commission (NEC) and played a critical advocacy role to solicit the support of relevant national stakeholders and Donor Partners to support the National Elections Commission.
 - ii. The deployment of a Long Term Election Observation Mission (LTEOM) from 16 September to 16 October 2017 with the objective of observing the most critical stages of the electoral process in order to identify and rapidly recommend corrective measures for issues that could derail the process.
 - iii. The deployment of a short term election observer mission from 5 to 14 October 2017 to observe the electoral processes around the country.
 - iv. The organisation of back-channel mediation training for Civil Society Organisations in the country from 18 - 22 July 2017 and training for Media professionals on responsible election reporting.
 - v. The organisation of a Gender and Election training workshop to encourage the participation of women in the electoral process.

- vi. Provision of financial assistance to the Government of Liberia towards the conduct of the elections.

IV. ECOWAS OBSERVATION OF THE ELECTIONS

A. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AND MEDIA

- 7- In line with the electoral calendar, the election campaigns kicked off on 31 July 2017 across the country. Candidates were able to visit the various counties to campaign for votes. Political parties and candidates conducted themselves in an exemplary manner and the campaign was generally calm and peaceful, with only few reported incidence. The Liberian National Police (LNP) provided adequate security at the various political campaign rallies and demonstrated professionalism in dealing with issues.
- 8- The Mission noted a liberal and pluralistic media landscape that provided the space for diverse opinions and the opportunity for the expression of views without hindrance. In a bid to ensure an issue-based campaign, a Presidential debate was held on 17 August 2017 involving the six presidential candidates. The ECOWAS LTEOM observed the second round of Presidential debate of 26 September 2017.

B. ECOWAS CONSULTATIONS & DEPLOYMENT

- 9- In achieving the objectives of the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission, the Head of Mission, His Excellency **John Dramani Mahama** upon arrival in Liberia on 5 October, 2017, held extensive consultations with various stakeholders involved in the electoral process. The Head of Mission also paid a courtesy visit to Her Excellency, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, President of the Republic of Liberia.
- 10- During his consultations, the Head of Mission met with the NEC Chairman, the Inspector General of Police (IGP), the Presidential Candidates or their representatives, leaders of civil society organisations, and Heads of International Election Observation Missions - AU, EU, EISA, Carter Centre and NDI. The Head of Mission also met with officials of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA).
- 11- In addressing the press, His Excellency **John Dramani Mahama** congratulated the various national stakeholders and appealed to all candidates and political parties to respect their commitment to peaceful elections as contained in the "Farmington Declaration". He also called on all stakeholders to maintain confidence in the democratic process and the impartiality of the various national institutions.

12- These consultations enabled the Head of Mission to note some concerns observed in the course of ECOWAS fact-finding and long term observation, which include: i) the series of court cases on resignation of candidates contesting for the elections; ii) the application of the residency clause for candidates contesting for election; and ii) the non-display of Final Registration Roll (FRR) by NEC.

13- The Mission noted with satisfaction the following:

- Efforts by the LNP to provide security in the pre-electoral period particularly its collaboration with the NEC to deploy elections security officers to all magisterial areas;
- The initiative by the LNP entitled "Yes to Peace & No to Violence" campaign enhanced trust and confidence between the LNP and the public;
- The signing and commitment of the political parties to the "Farmington Declaration" and the use of the Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC) to foster understanding and provide a platform for addressing issues of concern to the political parties;
- Efforts by civil society organisations to promote a robust and non-violent election environment and their complimenting role in supporting the NEC in civic and voter education across the country;
- The encouraging participation of women as candidates in the elections. While there is a slight increase in the number of women candidates over previous elections, the effect of the existence of a non-discriminatory clause as set by section 4.5 of the amended elections law of 2014 is not yet discernible. Over 90 percent of the political parties failed to meet the 30 percent threshold for gender representation.

14- Following further briefings, the ECOWAS Technical Team equipped and deployed ECOWAS STEOM to 12 of the 15 counties in the country, namely, Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu, Lofa, Bong, Bomi, Nimba, Grand Bassa, River Cess, Grand Gedeh and River Gee.

C. OPENING, CONDUCT OF THE ELECTION AND VOTE COUNTING

15- After preliminary assessment of the information forwarded to the Situation Room by observers deployed in the field and after a debriefing session with some of the observers upon their return from the field, the Mission noted:

- a) The timely distribution of electoral materials throughout the country and the early delivery of materials in sufficient quantities, as well as, the early arrival of electoral officials at the polling stations, which allowed voting to commence within an average of 25 minutes of the stipulated opening time of 8am in most of the polling centres visited. However, there are few places where voting started late at about 9:10 am due mainly to delay in setting up of the polling station and some confusion in understanding the voting procedures as

observed in ***District 1 (GW Perlson School) in Nimba*** and ***New Court High School in Greater Montserrado***;

- b) The (Mission noted) discreet and non-obtrusive presence of security agents across the country;
- c) The presence of different party agents at the polling places ranging from 5-15;
- d) The Final Registration Roll (FRR) and index list were used in admitting voters for the elections. However, the non-display of the FRR caused difficulties for voters to identify their polling places which led to delays in the voting process;
- e) The polling officials generally conducted themselves well, although some failed to demonstrate adequate knowledge of their roles;
- f) In accordance with the provisions of the NEC, voters with special needs were given priority and generally supported to cast their vote, with the exception of few crowded polling places. The role of roving team of the National Human Rights Commission in this regard is commendable;
- g) The positioning of the polling booths guaranteed the secrecy of the ballot;
- h) The presence of international observers group, which include AU, EU, EISA, Carter Centre and NDI, as well as observers from the US and other Embassies, and of large number of local observers, including Women Situation Room, Election Coordinating Committee (ECC), the Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON) and the Liberia Council of Churches;
- i) By 6pm, there were many voters on the queue in many polling stations visited by the ECOWAS observers. There were tensions and fear among the voters of losing the opportunity to exercise their franchise which was resolved by the extension of the polling period beyond 6pm in these polling stations;
- j) In spite of the late closing of polls in some polling stations due to the late opening, the counting and tallying processes at the polling stations were conducted in a transparent and credible manner, and under the watchful eyes of party agents and observers.

V. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Despite some administrative and logistic challenges, the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission noted with satisfaction the conduct of the 10 October 2017 polls in the Republic of Liberia.

17. The Mission urges the Electoral Commission to approach the concluding phases of the process with fairness, openness and transparency until the proclamation of the results. It calls on the party leaders, the candidates, their followers and the media to maintain the same posture of restraint, serenity and patriotism till the collation and announcement of the results.

18. The ECOWAS Observation Mission urges NEC to work diligently and expedite action on the proclamation of the provisional results to prevent further anxiety within the polity.

19. The Mission specifically congratulates the NEC leadership and officials for the professionalism demonstrated throughout the electoral process. It also pays tribute to the security agencies for their impartial and exemplary conduct during the elections, especially in identified flash points and the entire country. The

Mission commends UNMIL in airlifting electoral material (both sensitive and non-sensitive materials) to inaccessible parts of the country.

20. The Mission notes with concern the isolated cases of violence during the electoral process in some parts of the country and commends the efforts of the security forces, especially the Liberia National Police (LNP) for arresting the situation.

21. The Mission congratulates the candidates, their parties, supporters and the electorates for their maturity during the campaign and the voting process. It urges all candidates to put Liberian first by maintaining the peace. It appeals the candidates to gracefully accept the will of the people and in the event of genuine grievances, to resort exclusively to legal means to seek redress.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

22. In the light of the challenges identified by the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission in the field, ECOWAS would like to put forward the following recommendations:

- i. The NEC should look into the issue of the FRR and improve it by arranging names in alphabetical order and ensuring that the photos match serial numbers of voters;
- ii. Timely voter verification exercise should be conducted by NEC in accordance to the law to enhance the ability of voter to identify their names and polling places prior to elections;
- iii. Improved provision should be made by NEC to give priority and assistance to vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, nursing mothers, disabled, visually impaired, and the aged, to cast their votes;
- iv. All pending constitutional matters related to elections should be resolved prior to next elections;
- v. NEC should conduct relevant and early training for electoral officials to ;
- vi. The government should make adequate financial resources available to the NEC in a timely manner to facilitate its operations;

23. Finally, the ECOWAS Election Mission expresses gratitude to the Government and people of Liberia, the National Electoral Commission (NEC), security agencies and UNMIL for creating the enabling environment which enabled them to effectively accomplish their mission.

DONE AT MONROVIA THIS 11TH DAY OF OCTOBER 2017
His Excellency John Dramani Mahama
Head of Mission